

INTRODUCTION.

IT is not comfortable to have to write about "Arabia Deserta." I have studied it for ten years, and have grown to consider it a book not like other books, but something particular, a bible of its kind. To turn round now and reckon its merits and demerits seems absurd. I do not think that any traveller in Arabia before or since Mr. Doughty has qualified himself to praise the book—much less to blame it. The more you learn of Arabia the more you find in "Arabia Deserta." The more you travel there the greater your respect for the insight, judgment and artistry of the author. We call the book "Doughty" pure and simple, for it is a classic, and the personality of Mr. Doughty hardly comes into question. Indeed, it is rather shocking to learn that he is a real and living person. The book has no date and can never grow old. It is the first and indispensable work upon the Arabs of the desert; and if it has not always been referred to, or enough read, that has been because it was excessively rare. Every student of Arabia wants a copy.

However, there is no need at this time of day to commend Doughty to students. They all know of him. It is to the outside public, willing to read a great prose work, the record of the wanderings of an English poet for two years among the Beduins, that this edition must make its appeal, and perhaps with them that the verdict of present-day travellers in Arabia will have weight. I have talked the book over with many travellers, and we are agreed that here you have all the desert, its hills and plains, the lava fields, the villages, the tents, the men and animals. They are told of to the life, with words and phrases fitted to them so perfectly that one cannot dissociate them in memory. It is the true Arabia, the land with its smells and dirt, as well as its nobility and freedom. There is no sentiment, nothing merely picturesque, that most common failing of oriental travel-books. Doughty's completeness is devastating. There is nothing we would take away, little we could add. He took all Arabia for his province, and has left to his successors only the poor part of specialists. We may write books on parts of the desert or some of the history of it; but there can never be another picture of the whole, in our time, because here it is all said, and by a great master.

There have been many well-endowed Englishmen travelling in Arabia, and most of them have written books. None have brought away a prize as rich as Doughty brought, and the merit of this is his own unaided merit. He had many things against him. Forty years ago the desert was less hospitable to strangers than it is to-day. Turkey was still strong there, and the Wahabi movement had kept fanaticism vivid in the tribes. Doughty was a pioneer, both as European and Christian, in nearly all the districts he entered. Also he was poor. He came down a lone man from Damascus with the pilgrim caravan, and was left behind at Medain Salih with scant recommendation. He struck out into the desert dressed like the very poor, travelling like the very poor, trying to maintain himself by the practice of rational medicine, in a society more willing to invest in charms.

Then he was a sick man. His health was weak when he started, and the climate of the plateau of Arabia is a trying one, with its extremes of heat and cold, and the poverty of its nourishment. He had been brought up in England, a fruitful country of rich and plentiful food. He came as a guest to the Arab tents, to share their lean hospitality, and to support himself on the little that sufficed them. They treated him to what they had themselves. Their skinny bodies subsisted well enough on a spring season of camel-milk, and rare meals of dates or meat for the barren months of the year, but such a diet was starvation for an Englishman. It would be short commons to a sedentary man; but Doughty was for ever wandering about, often riding from sunrise to sunset, if not for half the night, in forced marches across rocky and toilsome country, under a burning sun, or in keen exhausting winds. Travel in Arabia in the best circumstances, with a train of servants, good riding-beasts, tents and your own kitchen, is a trying experience. Doughty faced it native-fashion, in spite of his physical disadvantages, and brought home more booty than we all. The sheer endurance of his effort is wonderful.

Somewhere he half apologises for his defects, calling his book the seeing of a hungry man, the telling of a most weary man; nevertheless he seems to have recorded everything. We have all sometimes been weary in the desert, and some of us have been hungry there, but none of us triumphed over our bodies as Doughty did. He makes his hardships a positive profit to him, by distilling from them into his pages that sense of strain and desolation which will remind every Arabian traveller vividly of his own less fortunate moments. Yet even at such times, coming so often in these two dangerous years, Doughty's keenness of observation was not reduced. He goes on showing us the

circumstances and the characters and the places of his tale, without any loss of interest: and that this could be so is a high testimony, not only to his strength of mind, but also to the imaginative appeal of Arabia and the Arabs to him and to us.

For his own strength of character his book stands unconscious witness. He has revealed himself to us in his pages indirectly (the book is never morbid, never introspective), almost unwillingly, for the way of telling is detached, making no parade of good or evil. He refused to be the hero of his story. Yet he was very really the hero of his journey, and the Arabs knew how great he was. I spent nine months in Western Arabia, much of it in the districts through which he had passed, and I found that he had become history in the desert. It was more than forty years ago, and that space of time would even in our country cause much to be forgotten. In the desert it is relatively longer, for the hardships of common life leave little chance for the body to recruit itself, and so men are short-lived and their memories of strangers, and events outside the family tree, soon fail. Doughty's visit was to their fathers or grandfathers, and yet they have all learned of him. They tell tales of him, making something of a legend of the tall and impressive figure, very wise and gentle, who came to them like a herald of the outside world. His aloofness from the common vexations of their humanity coloured their imagination. He was very patient, generous and pitiful, to be accepted into their confidence without doubt.

They say that he seemed proud only of being Christian, and yet never crossed their faith. He was book-learned, but simple in the arts of living, ignorant of camels, trustful of every man, very silent. He was the first Englishman they had met. He predisposed them to give a chance to other men of his race, because they had found him honourable and good. So he broke a road for his religion. He was followed by Mr. Wilfrid Blunt and Miss Gertrude Bell, other strong personalities. They confirmed the desert in its view of Englishmen, and gave us a privileged position which is a grave responsibility upon all who follow them. Thanks to them an Englishman finds a welcome in Arabia, and can travel, not indeed comfortably for it is a terrible land, but safely over the tracks which Doughty opened with such pains. No country has been more fortunate in its ambassadors. We are accepted as worthy persons unless we prove ourselves the contrary by our own misdoings. This is no light monument to the memory of the man who stamped so clear an impression of his virtue on a nomad people in the casual journeyings of two years.

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We export two chief kinds of Englishmen, who in foreign parts divide themselves into two opposed classes. Some feel deeply the influence of the native people, and try to adjust themselves to its atmosphere and spirit. To fit themselves modestly into the picture they suppress all in them that would be discordant with local habits and colours. They imitate the native as far as possible, and so avoid friction in their daily life. However, they cannot avoid the consequences of imitation, a hollow, worthless thing. They are like the people but not of the people, and their half-perceptible differences give them a sham influence often greater than their merit. They urge the people among whom they live into strange, unnatural courses by imitating them so well that they are imitated back again. The other class of Englishmen is the larger class. In the same circumstance of exile they reinforce their character by memories of the life they have left. In reaction against their foreign surroundings they take refuge in the England that was theirs. They assert their aloofness, their immunity, the more vividly for their loneliness and weakness. They impress the peoples among whom they live by reaction, by giving them an ensample of the complete Englishman, the foreigner intact.

Doughty is a great member of the second, the cleaner class. He says that he was never oriental, though the sun made him an Arab; and much of his value lies in the distinction. His seeing is altogether English: yet at the same time his externals, his manners, his dress, and his speech were Arabic, and nomad Arab, of the desert. The desert inhibits considered judgments; its bareness and openness make its habitants frank. Men in it speak out their minds suddenly and unreservedly. Words in the desert are clear-cut. Doughty felt this contagion of truthfulness sharply (few travel-journals show a greater sensibility to climate and geography than this), and among the tribes he delivered himself like them. Even in the villages he maintained an untimely and uncompromising bluntness, in a firm protest against the glozing politic speech of the town-Arabs. His own origin was from the settled country of England, and this preference for the nomad might seem strange; but in practice the Englishman, and especially the Englishman of family, finds the tribes more to his taste than the villages, and Doughty everywhere is the outspoken Beduin. His "stiffness to maintain a just opinion against the half-reason of the world" was often unwise—but always respectable, and the Arabs respected him for it even where they resented it most.

Very climatic, too, are his sudden changes of tone and judgment. The desert is a place of passing sensation, of cash-payment

of opinion. Men do not hold their minds in suspense for days, to arrive at a just and balanced average of thought. They say good at once when it is good, and bad at once when it is bad. Doughty has mirrored this also for us in himself. One paragraph will have a harsh judgment; the next is warm kindness. His record ebbs and flows with his experience, and by reading not a part of the book but all of it you obtain a many-sided sympathetic vision, in the round, of his companions of these stormy and eventful years.

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The realism of the book is complete. Doughty tries to tell the full and exact truth of all that he saw. If there is a bias it will be against the Arabs, for he liked them so much; he was so impressed by the strange attraction, isolation and independence of this people that he took pleasure in bringing out their virtues by a careful expression of their faults. "If one live any time with the Arab he will have all his life after a feeling of the desert." He had experienced it himself, the test of nomadism, that most deeply biting of all social disciplines, and for our sakes he strained all the more to paint it in its true colours, as a life too hard, too empty, too denying for all but the strongest and most determined men. Nothing is more powerful and real than this record of all his daily accidents and obstacles, and the feelings that came to him on the way. His picture of the Semites, sitting to the eyes in a cloaca, but with their brows touching Heaven, sums up in full measure their strength and weakness, and the strange contradictions of their thought which quicken our curiosity at our first meeting with them.

To try and solve their riddle many of us have gone far into their society, and seen the clear hardness of their belief, a limitation almost mathematical, which repels us by its unsympathetic form. Semites have no half-tones in their register of vision. They are a people of primary colours, especially of black and white, who see the world always in line. They are a certain people, despising doubt, our modern crown of thorns. They do not understand our metaphysical difficulties, our self-questionings. They know only truth and untruth, belief and unbelief, without our hesitating retinue of finer shades.

Semites are black and white not only in vision, but in their inner furnishing; black and white not merely in clarity, but in apposition. Their thoughts live easiest among extremes. They inhabit superlatives by choice. Sometimes the great inconsistencies seem to possess them jointly. They exclude compromise, and pursue the logic of their ideas to its absurd ends, without seeing incongruity in their opposed conclusions. They oscillate

with cool head and tranquil judgment from asymptote to asymptote, so imperturbably that they would seem hardly conscious of their giddy flight.

They are a limited narrow-minded people whose inert intellects lie incuriously fallow. Their imaginations are keen but not creative. There is so little Arab art to-day in Asia that they can nearly be said to have no art, though their rulers have been liberal patrons and have encouraged their neighbours' talents in architecture, ceramic and handicraft. They show no longing for great industry, no organisations of mind or body anywhere. They invent no systems of philosophy or mythologies. They are the least morbid of peoples, who take the gift of life unquestioning, as an axiom. To them it is a thing inevitable, entailed on man, a usufruct, beyond our control. Suicide is a thing nearly impossible and death no grief.

They are a people of spasms, of upheavals, of ideas, the race of the individual genius. Their movements are the more shocking by contrast with the quietude of every day, their great men greater by contrast with the humanity of their mass. Their convictions are by instinct, their activities intuitional. Their largest manufacture is of creeds. They are monopolists of revealed religions, finding always an antagonism of body and spirit, and laying their stress on the spirit. Their profound reaction against matter leads them to preach barrenness, renunciation, poverty: and this atmosphere stifles the minds of the desert pitilessly. They are always looking out towards those things in which mankind has had no lot or part.

The Beduin has been born and brought up in the desert, and has embraced this barrenness too harsh for volunteers with all his soul, for the reason, felt but inarticulate, that there he finds himself indubitably free. He loses all natural ties, all comforting superfluities or complications, to achieve that personal liberty which haunts starvation and death. He sees no virtue in poverty herself; he enjoys the little vices and luxuries—coffee, fresh water, women—which he can still afford. In his life he has air and winds, sun and light, open spaces and great emptiness. There is no human effort, no fecundity in Nature; just heaven above and unspotted earth beneath; and the only refuge and rhythm of their being is in God. This single God is to the Arab not anthropomorphic, not tangible or moral or ethical, not concerned particularly with the world or with him. He alone is great, and yet there is a homeliness, an every-day-ness of this Arab God who rules their eating, their fighting and their lusting; and is their commonest thought, and companion, in a way impossible to those whose God is tediously veiled from them by

the decorum of formal worship. They feel no incongruity in bringing God into their weaknesses and appetites. He is the commonest of their words.

This creed of the desert is an inheritance. The Arab does not value it extremely. He has never been either evangelist or proselyte. He arrives at this intense condensation of himself in God by shutting his eyes to the world, and to all the complex possibilities latent in him which only wealth and temptation could bring out. He attains a sure trust and a powerful trust, but of how narrow a field! His sterile experience perverts his human kindness to the image of the waste in which he hides. Accordingly he hurts himself, not merely to be free, but to please himself. There follows a self-delight in pain, a cruelty which is more to him than goods. The desert Arab finds no joy like the joy of voluntarily holding back. He finds luxury in abnegation, renunciation, self-restraint. He lives his own life in a hard selfishness. His desert is made a spiritual ice-house, in which is preserved intact but unimproved for all ages an idea of the unity of God.

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Doughty went among these people dispassionately, looked at their life, and wrote it down word for word. By being always Arab in manner and European in mind he maintained a perfect judgment, while bearing towards them a full sympathy which persuaded them to show him their inmost ideas. When his trial of two years was over he carried away in his note-book (so far as the art of writing can express the art of living) the soul of the desert, the complete existence of a remarkable and self-contained community, shut away from the currents of the world in the unchanging desert, working out their days in an environment utterly foreign to us. The economic reason for their existence is the demand for camels, which can be best bred on the thorns and plants of these healthy uplands. The desert is incapable of other development, but admirably suited to this. Their camel-breeding makes the Beduins nomads. The camels live only on the pasture of the desert, and as it is scanty a great herd will soon exhaust any one district. Then they with their masters must move to another, and so they circulate month by month in a course determined by the vegetation sprung up wherever the intermittent winter rains have this season fallen heaviest.

The social organisation of the desert is in tribes, partly because of original family-feeling, partly because the instinct of self-preservation compels large masses of men to hold together for mutual support. By belonging to a recognised tribe each man

feels that he has a strong body of nominal kinsmen, to support him if he is injured; and equally to bear the burden and to discharge his wrong-doing, when he is the guilty party. This collective responsibility makes men careful not to offend; and makes punishment very easy. The offender is shut out from the system, and becomes an exile till he has made his peace again with the public opinion of his tribesmen.

Each tribe has its district in the desert. The extent and nature of these tribal districts are determined by the economic laws of camel-breeding. Each holds a fair chance of pasture all the year round in every normal year, and each holds enough drinking-water to suffice all its households every year; but the poverty of the country forces an internal subdivision of itself upon the tribe. The water-sources are usually single wells (often very scanty wells), and the pasturages small scattered patches in sheltered valleys or oases among the rocks. They could not accommodate at one time or place all the tribe, which therefore breaks into clans, and lives always as clans, wandering each apart on its own cycle within the orbit of the tribal whole.

The society is illiterate, so each clan keeps small enough to enable all its adults to meet frequently, and discuss all common business verbally. Such general intercourse, and their open life beside one another in tents makes the desert a place altogether without privacy. Man lives candidly with man. It is a society in perpetual movement, an equality of voice and opportunity for every male. The daily hearth or sheikh's coffee-gathering is their education, a university for every man grown enough to walk and speak.

It is also their news-office, their tribunal, their political expression, and their government. They bring and expose there in public every day all their ideas, their experiences, their opinions, and they sharpen one another, so that the desert society is always alive, instructed to a high moral level, and tolerant of new ideas. Common rumour makes them as unchanging as the desert in which they live; but more often they show themselves singularly receptive, very open to useful innovations. Their few vested interests make it simple for them to change their ways; but even so it is astonishing to find how whole-heartedly they adopt an invention fitted to their life. Coffee, gunpowder, Manchester cotton are all new things, and yet appear so native that without them one can hardly imagine their desert life.

Consequently, one would expect a book such as "Arabia Deserta," written forty years ago, to be inaccurate to-day in such little respects, and had Doughty's work been solely scientific, dependent on the expression rather than the spirit of things, its

day might have passed. Happily the beauty of the telling, its truth to life, the rich gallery of characters and landscapes in it, will remain for all time, and will keep it peerless, as the indispensable foundation of all true understanding of the desert. And in these forty years the material changes have not been enough to make them really worth detailed record.

The inscriptions at Medain Salih have been studied since his day by the Dominican fathers from Jerusalem, and some little points added to his store. The great stone at Teima which lay in the *haddaj*, was looked for by later travellers, and at last purchased and carried off to Europe. Doughty's collections of these primitive Arab scripts have been surpassed; but he holds the enduring credit of their discovery. His map, and some of his geographical information have been added to, and brought into relation with later information. People with cameras have wandered up and down the Aueyrid *harrat* in which he spent weeks, and of which he wrote so vivid a description. We know their outside face exactly, from photographs; but to read Doughty is to know what they make one feel. Crossley and Rolls-Royce cars have made a road of some of that Wadi Humth, whose importance he first made clear to Europe. Aeroplanes have quartered the hills in which he found such painful going. Unfortunately those in cars and aeroplanes are not able to write intimate books about the country over which they pass.

Another change in Arabia has come from the Hejaz Railway, which in 1909 was opened from Damascus to Medina, and at once put an end to the great army which used to perform the pilgrimage by road. The Emir el Haj and his people now go by train, and the annual pageant of the camel-caravan is dead. The pilgrim road, of whose hundreds of worn tracks Doughty gave us such a picture, is now gone dull for lack of all those feet to polish it, and the kellas and cisterns from which he drank on the march to Medain Salih are falling into ruin, except so far as they serve the need of some guard-house on the railway.

The Rashid dynasty in Hail has pursued as bloody a course since his day as before it. Saud, the last Emir, was murdered in 1920, and the sole survivor of the family is an infant, whose precarious minority is being made the play of the ambition of one and another of the great chiefs of the Shammari tribe. On the other hand, the Wahabi dynasty of Riath, which seemed in its decline, has suddenly revived in this generation, thanks to the courage and energy of Abd el-Aziz, the present Emir. He has subdued all Nejd with his arms, has revived the Wahabi sect in new stringency, and bids fair to subject all the inner deserts of the peninsula to his belief. The Emir's younger son was lately in

the Deputation he sent to this country, under the conduct of Mr. H. St. J. Philby, C.I.E., sometime British Resident at er-Riâth, during the Great War. Whilst in England they visited Mr. Doughty.

The Sherifate of Mecca, in whose humanity Doughty reposed at Taif at the end of his adventures, made a bid for the intellectual leadership of the Arabs in 1916 by rebelling against Turkey on the principle of nationality. The Western Arabs, among whom Doughty's ways had so long fallen, took a chivalrous part in the war as the allies of Great Britain and with our help. The Sherif's four sons put themselves at the head of the townsmen and tribesmen of the Hejaz, and gave the British officers assisting them the freedom of the desert. All the old names were in our ranks. There were Harb, Juheyma, and Billi, whom Doughty mentioned. His old hosts, the Abu Shamah Moahib, joined us, and did gallantly. Ferhan, Motlog's son, brought with him the Allayda, and with the other Fejr they took Teyma and Kheybar from their Turkish garrisons, and handed them over to King Hussein.

Later the Shammar joined us, and volunteers came from Kasim, from Aneyza, Boreyda and Russ to help the common war upon the Turks. We took Medain Salih and El Ally, and further north Tebuk and Maan, the Beni Sakhr country, and all the pilgrim road up to Damascus, making in arms the return journey of that by which Doughty had begun his wanderings. "Arabia Deserta," which had been a joy to read, as a great record of adventure and travel (perhaps the greatest in our language), and the great picture-book of nomad life, became a military text-book, and helped to guide us to victory in the East. The Arabs who had allowed Doughty to wander in their forbidden provinces were making a good investment for their sons and grandsons.

In this great experience of war the focus of motive in the desert changed, and a political revolution came to the Arabs. In Doughty's day, as his book shows, there were Moslems and Christians, as main divisions of the people. Yesterday the distinction faded; there were only those on the side of the Allies, and those with the Central Powers. The Western Arabs, in these forty years, had learned enough of the ideas of Europe to accept nationality as a basis for action. They accepted it so thoroughly that they went into battle against their Caliph, the Sultan of Turkey, to win their right to national freedom. Religion, which had been the motive and character of the desert, yielded to politics, and Mecca, which had been a City of worship, became the temporal capital of a new state. The hostility which had been directed against Christians became directed against the

foreigner who presumed to interfere in the domestic affairs of Arabic-speaking provinces.

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However, this note grows too long. Those just men who begin at the beginning of books are being delayed by me from reading Doughty, and so I am making worse my presumption in putting my name near what I believe to be one of the great prose works of our literature. It is a book which begins powerfully, written in a style which has apparently neither father nor son, so closely wrought, so tense, so just in its words and phrases, that it demands a hard reader. It seems not to have been written easily; but in a few of its pages you learn more of the Arabs than in all that others have written, and the further you go the closer the style seems to cling to the subject, and the more natural it becomes to your taste.

The history of the march of the caravan down the pilgrim road, the picture of Zeyd's tent, the description of Ibn Rashid's court at Hail, the negroid village in Kheybar, the urbane life at Aneyza, the long march across the desert of Western Nejd to Mecca, each seems better than the one before till there comes the very climax of the book near Taif, and after this excitement a gentle closing chapter of the road down to Jidda, to the hospitality of Mohammed Nasif's house, and the British Consulate.

To have accomplished such a journey would have been achievement enough for the ordinary man. Mr. Doughty was not content till he had made the book justify the journey as much as the journey justified the book, and in the double power, to go and to write, he will not soon find his rival.

T. E. LAWRENCE.

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